



# ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY POLITICS

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## INTRODUCTION

The discourse on Ethnicity, and Identity Politics imply as common link with some notable and important differences at the periphery Ethnicity and identity politics are deeply interconnected in modern discussions about social, cultural, and political issues. Ethnicity and identity politics has become a central issue in contemporary political debates, influencing elections, policymaking, and social movements.

## Aims and Objectives

After studying this paper one will be able to understand and appreciate:

- The basic concept of ethnicity and its various dimensions
- Concept of community and its characteristics
- Identity as a whole

This particular research attempts to fill that gap by focusing on the intersection of ethnic self-identification and political engagement.

## METHODOLOGY

### • Research Design:

A qualitative way to explore the relationship between ethnicity and political engagement. The research is based on secondary data mostly. However, the researcher has a vast experience of field trips related to the study under discussion.

The study surveyed 50 participants from ethnically diverse rural areas, ensuring a representative mix of age, gender, and socioeconomic background.”

### • Data Collection Methods:

Data were gathered through structured surveys with questions on ethnic self-identification, political affiliation, and voting behavior.”

## Concept of Ethnicity

Unlike race, which has often been defined by perceived physical traits, ethnicity is more related to cultural identity. Ethnic groups can be large or small, and people may identify strongly with their ethnicity as a primary form of belonging.

Devos has aptly commented that “Ethnicity is like religion, people seem to need it.” An ethnic group (or Ethnicity) is a group of people whose members identify with each other through a common heritage, often consisting of a common language, a common culture and an ideology that stresses common ancestry

or endogamy. There is as of now no acceptable single word in English for the phrase “Ethnic Group” however the French anthropologists have suggested the word ethnic for technical usage. An ethnic group is a self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include “folk” religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin. The group’s actual history often trails off into legend or mythology, which includes some concept of an unbroken biological genetic generational continuity, sometimes regarded as giving special inherited characteristics to the group.

The term Ethnicity is used to indicate ethnic consciousness or sense of ethnic identity of a people or community relating to their political, social and cultural personality.

## Concept of Identity

Identity in Social Science parlance is to describe a person’s conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliations that derives from their national identity and cultural identity. Every individual has its own identity and that is how one is distinguished from the other. The concept of identity has various connotations. Psychologists used the term identity to mean personal identity. While the Sociologists use the term to describe social identity. Whatever the terms may be used but the basic fundamental of identity remains the same which is the “I” or the “self”. Identity cannot be misconstrued with “Ego”.

As per the social anthropologists, the concept of identity became a subject of interest and research after the emergence of such concepts of Ethnicity and Social Movements in the 1970s. There are several approaches to define the identity in the present contest. Out of many two approaches may be discussed to drive the point home. The first favors a primordialist approach which takes the sense of self and belonging to a collective group as a fixed thing, defined by objective criteria such as common ancestry and common biological characteristics. The second, rooted in social constructionist theory, takes the view that identity is formed by a predominantly political choice of certain characteristics. In so doing, it questions the idea that identity is a natural given, characterized by fixed, supposedly objective criteria. Both approaches need to be understood in their respective political and historical contexts, characterized by debate on issues of class, race and ethnicity. While they have been criticized, they continue to exert an influence on approaches to the conceptualisation of identity today.

Identity is a virtual concept hence it is very difficult to explain in an empirical manner. While identity is a volatile, flexible and abstract 'thing', its manifestations and the ways in which it is exercised are often open to view. Identity is made evident through the use of markers such as language, dress, behaviour and choice of space, whose effect depends on their recognition by other social beings. Markers help to create the boundaries that define similarities and dissimilarities between the marker wearer and the marker perceivers their effectiveness depends on a shared understanding of their meaning. In a social context, misunderstandings can arise due to a misinterpretation of the significance of specific markers.

### Identity Politics

Identity politics refers to political positions, movements, or actions that are based on the interests, needs, or experiences of particular social groups, often defined by characteristics such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, and, of course, ethnicity. Identity politics emphasizes the significance of personal and group identity in shaping an individual's experiences, especially in relation to systems of power, privilege, and discrimination.

### Relationship Between Ethnicity and Identity Politics

Ethnicity plays a central role in identity politics because it is a major determinant of how people experience the world, particularly in terms of social status, discrimination, and opportunity. For example:

1. **Cultural Preservation and Recognition:** Ethnic communities often engage in identity politics to secure recognition for their culture, language, or traditions in the public sphere. This might involve campaigns for language rights, cultural heritage preservation, or the right to practice traditional customs without discrimination.
2. **Resistance to Oppression:** Ethnic groups that have faced historical marginalization or discrimination (e.g., Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Romani people) may use identity politics to challenge dominant narratives and demand equality, reparations, or political representation. This often involves asserting ethnic pride, affirming group identity, and seeking policies that directly address the impacts of oppression.
3. **Solidarity and Political Mobilization:** Ethnic identity can be a unifying force, helping groups organize around common issues. For example, movements like Black Lives Matter or Indigenous land rights movements center around ethnic identity, but also address broader issues of social justice, equity, and human rights.
4. **Intersectionality:** Ethnicity is often not the sole determinant of identity. Individuals may identify with multiple categories (e.g., a Black woman, a Latino gay person), and their political engagement may reflect the intersections of these identities. This has led to more nuanced approaches in identity politics, which take into account overlapping forms of discrimination or privilege.

### Criticism of Ethnicity in Identity Politics

While ethnicity-based identity politics has been an important tool for empowerment, it has also faced criticism:

- **Essentialism:** Some critics argue that emphasizing

ethnicity too strongly can lead to a reductionist view of individuals, suggesting that all members of an ethnic group have the same experiences or values.

- **Division vs. Unity:** Critics also suggest that identity politics, when too focused on ethnic distinctions, can exacerbate divisions in society, preventing collective solidarity across different groups. They argue it may lead to fragmentation and the prioritization of narrow group interests over broader, more inclusive goals.
- **Manipulation by Political Elites:** There are concerns that political elites may manipulate ethnic identity politics to maintain power by pitting different ethnic groups against one another, diverting attention from class, economic, or broader structural issues.

### CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing body of research on ethnicity and identity politics, highlighting the importance of ethnic self-identification in shaping political behavior. The results support the hypothesis that ethnic identity plays a significant role in shaping political views, aligning with previous studies that suggest group solidarity influences political preferences. It further leaves us with an enquiry, "Does ethnic self-identification correlate with political preferences and civic engagement?"

Hence, despite all its drawback, ethnicity and identity politics continue to shape global political discourse, helping marginalized groups assert their rights, seek justice, and define their own narratives.

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